

WASHINGTON -- Suburban House Republicans unveiled a batch of proposals Wednesday geared to build on their traditional support in areas outside major cities.

Among the measures in the seven-bill package is one that would link state and national criminal databases to make sure pedophiles are not hired as teachers, another that would set guidelines for establishing electronic medical records and another to establish local grant programs to protect suburban open space.

"Drug gangs are moving to our suburban communities, thousands of online predators are trying to contact our kids, green and open space is rapidly disappearing from our neighborhoods and millions of Americans worry that it may be more difficult for their children to enter the middle class than it was for us," said Rep. Mark Kirk, chairman of the Suburban Caucus, which includes more than 50 GOP members.

At a news conference with fellow caucus members, Kirk offered assurances that the proposals deal with real concerns identified with suburban residents. For example, he said, gangs are a concern in his district best known for its famously affluent north Chicago suburbs.

"In my district, there are more than 3,000 gang members north of the Lake Cook Road," he said. "It's entirely a suburban community."

The package includes an anti-gang proposal sponsored by Rep. Dave Reichert, R-Wash., a former King County, Wash., sheriff, that would require the U.S. attorney general to list the three largest gangs nationwide and then take up to four years to spell out a plan for dealing with them.

House Speaker Dennis Hastert of Illinois and House Majority Leader John Boehner of Ohio endorsed the Kirk-led effort and indicated the package could come to a vote on the House floor at some point.

House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi's office derided the Republicans' efforts as benefiting the "privileged few."

"Suburban Americans want real solutions to skyrocketing gas prices, growing health care costs, and to make college more affordable - not Republicans' election year rhetoric," spokeswoman Jennifer Crider said.

Kirk said he had been working on the legislation for the past couple of years, with intensive efforts devoted to it in the past six months. He acknowledged that Democrats had not been invited to the news conference, even though Democrats are among supporters of some of the bills.

"This agenda becomes much more power powerful when we have Democratic support," the Highland Park lawmaker said.

Recent polls have shown that GOP lawmakers might be vulnerable during the November general election - enough perhaps to allow Democrats to regain control of the House for the first time since 1994.

Kirk's seat is considered safe.